

# The Use Of ICT In The Teaching/Learning Of Phonetics And Phonology In Primary And Secondary Schools In Nigeria

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## Abstract

Information and Communication Technology (ICT) has been in use in Education in some developed countries for a few decades now. Although it has been used to teach various subjects in the school curriculum, it has not been commonly used to teach phonetics and phonology in the English Language. The thrust of this paper is to explore the possibility of using ICT in primary and secondary schools to teach the spoken aspect of the English Language. The researcher identifies the various aspects of phonology to be taught and conclude with vital recommendations among which are the provision of computer in every classroom and urgent training of teachers in the use of ICT for teaching in primary and secondary schools in Nigeria.

**Keywords:** ICT, Phonology, Phonetics, Oral English,

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## Introduction

There are various speakers of the English language in Nigeria today. Many speakers who are not specialists in the Language speak without minding the pronunciation of some words which may confuse listeners and render international intelligibility unattainable. It may not be easy to speak Standard English (SE) or Received Pronunciation (RP) without the knowledge of what phonetics and phonology are all about.

Phonetics is the identification, description and classification of the sounds used in articulate speech. It is the study of speech sounds of languages and how they are produced while phonology is the study of the speech sounds of a particular language and how they are produced (Hornby, 2001). From the above definition, it is clear that phonetics is general while phonology is specific. Likewise, Olowoyeye (2004) sees phonetics as the general study of the characteristics and features of sound. While phonetics is concerned with the correct description of sounds of a language, their utterances and shapes phonology, on the other hand, isolates the sounds used in a language, describes how they are used and where they contrast with one another, identifies the range of words belonging to 'vowels' 'consonants', accounts for the intonation and the stress.

Ekundare (1993) and Afe (1994) identify three types of phonetics as follows, these are;

- Articulatory Phonetics is the study of the way by which human sounds are produced in the organs of speech.
- Auditory Phonetics is the study of how human sound waves, are received and interpreted in the hearer's ears or speech organs or how a receiver perceives the feature of the sound produced.
- Acoustic Phonetics is the study of human sound waves and their physical characteristics/features/properties. This had earlier been identified by Schane (1983)

The following example illustrates the difference between phonetics and phonology. In the English Language, when the sound /k/ (usually spelt c) occurs at the beginning of a word, as in the word 'cut', it is pronounced with aspiration (a puff of breath).

However, when this sound occurs at the end of a word, as in 'tuck' there is no aspiration. Phonetically the aspirated /k/ and un-aspirated /k/ are different sounds never distinguish one word from another, and English Language speakers are usually unaware of the phonetic difference until it is pointed out (to them). Thus the English Language makes no phonological difference/distinction between the aspirated and un-aspirated /k/.

Phonology which is commonly called Oral English in some schools had not received adequate attention in some schools for many reasons like the onset of Nigerian English, the speaking of Pidgin English coupled with the attitude of Nigerians to the speaking of Received Pronunciation. A good speaker of the English Language is often ridiculed in the public with the word "phone\*" a local abbreviation of phonetics to imply that the speaker is attempting to communicate like a native speaker of the English Language or imitating a Briton.

This is what Bamisaye (2006) describes as the negative attitude on the part of teachers and learners. According to him, some students school children are afraid of being laughed at and attempt to shy away from speaking correctly while some teachers feel that it is not necessary to strive to appropriate the standard norm.

## The Role of ICT in Teaching Oral English

Information Communication Technology (ICT) is a modern device designed to pass information from one person to another. It can be likened to instructional material to aid the teaching and learning process. This is possible not only when the encoder and decoder face

each other in a communication environment but when they are several kilometres away from each other.

ICT involves the use of the Internet, telephone, fax, newsprint, radio, television, video/audio conferencing etc. Any of these can be used for communication as posited by Afe (2002) that communication is a way of transmitting or passing ideas, feelings, information, message and intentions to a target audience through previously agreed symbols. The target audience can be anywhere in the world and can be reached through ICT.

Specialists in the English Language who are newscasters in the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) can communicate with Nigerian students over the radio to teach phonetics and phonology. As students in secondary schools also watch the Cable. News Network (CNN) with primary school pupils in Nigeria, they can listen to the correct pronunciation of some words in the English Language and attempt speaking with a white accent at home and in school. Recorded tapes have been used for some years by the National Teachers' Institute (NTI) and the West African Examinations Council (WAEC) to test Oral English with Listening comprehension cutting across all the phonemes of English.

ICT is so vital in the present millennium and the next one that it makes will make the teaching and learning of the sounds of the English Language easy. Olowoyeye, Deji-Afuye, Aladesusi (2022) stress the impact of multimedia in the teaching/learning of English on students. As long as the language remains our official Language in schools and government circles, we cannot afford to speak it anyhow. This paper, therefore, examines the concept and content of phonetics and phonology in primary and secondary schools. Many pupils learn so many things related to their discipline through ICT. Examples are exhaustive as far as using ICT to teach the aspect of the English Language discussed in this paper is concerned.

### **General Problems Affecting the Teaching of Phonology**

The teaching of phonetics and phonology in primary and secondary schools in Nigeria has not received the necessary attention. In primary school, these aspects are not given any attention. It is only taught at the senior secondary level because it is tested in the School Certificate Examination conducted by the West African Examinations Council (WAEC) and the National Examinations Council (NECO).

The reasons for not teaching the aspect at the primary and secondary levels are not farfetched. Olusola (1994) identified some factors responsible for the phenomenon; among such factors are;

- Lack of highly qualified personnel
- Non-availability of language laboratories and teaching materials
- Interference of the mother tongue.
- The absence of instructional materials like tapes, charts e.t.c.
- Lack of incentives for teaching the aspect
- The stereotyped method of examining the students at the SSCE level
- The poor background of the students in the aspect and
- The prohibitive price of oral English textbooks

The first problem identified concerning highly qualified teachers affects the teaching of phonetics and phonology at virtually all levels. At the primary school level, specialists in the English Language are very few because a certificate in the English Language is not a requirement for teaching in a primary school according to the Federal Republic of Nigeria National Policy on Education (2004). It is the National Certificate in Education in any discipline. Unfortunately, many of the new NCE holders cannot communicate effectively in the English Language.

Afe (2000), opine that Oral English is not learnt or taught only for examinations but for communication in public formally and informally. He also assesses that the inability of teachers to teach the aspects at the Junior Secondary level affects students' performance in the SSCE. In Junior secondary school where Oral English should be taught in all classes, it is left untouched by some teachers whereas Aboderin (1989) assigns the aspect 54 units when analyzing the aspects of English to be taught at that level and allocating units to it as follows;

Structures 54 units

Spoken English 54 units

Vocabulary 16 units

Comprehension 18 units

Writing 18 units

Literature 17 units

TOTAL 167 units

Neglecting the teaching of the aspect in Junior Secondary School inflicts an injury on a child who has no opportunity of proceeding to the next level.

### Phonology in The Primary/Secondary Schools - Problems & Solutions

This may appear very strange in a primary school because as it has earlier been and oral English is not taught in primary school up till now. The present situation in Nigeria in Primary Schools is what is obtained in Secondary Schools. In the 1980s it was *tested* as a separate examination at WASCE or GCEO level. At that time and even now in our Primary Schools, according to Jowitt (2000), teachers find the aspect difficult to teach partly because they are not sure that their speech reflects the pronunciation form of Standard English (SE/RP). This makes the teachers neglect the Oral English in the course book they use in class.

Abidakun (1994) conducted research on the phonological problems encountered by primary school children and gave teachers and pupils different questionnaires to fill and became out with the following findings: the problems militating against the teaching of Oral English in primary school are:

- The quantity and quality of teachers.
- Interference arises from the differences between the English and Yoruba alphabet.
- The problem with instructional facilities

In detecting specific problems of pupils, the researcher asked pupils to pronounce following words: that, mother, murder, mix, world, word, hear, hair, change, measure, church, crop, coup, coop, shock and shall. It was discovered that less than thirty per cent of the pupil could pronounce a few of the words correctly. This is because some of the phonemes of English that are absent from the Yoruba phonological inventory as identified by Oyewole (1998) and Jowitt (2000) are often substituted with seemingly similar ones in the mother tongue (MT).

Such phonemes are; /v/, /df, 13!, /©/, /z/ and it/,

/v/ is substituted with /f/ as in very pronounced as 'feri' /5/ is substituted with /d/ as in them pronounced as 'dem' W is substituted with /f/ as in vision pronounced as 'vishion' /9/ is substituted with /t/ as in thought pronounced as 'tought' /z/ is substituted with /s/ as in the word zoo pronounced as 'suu' /tj/ Is substituted with /\! as in cheap pronounced as "sheep" among the Yoruba.

Usman and Mustafa (2014) research the challenges of teaching oral English in Nigerian high schools through questionnaires on teachers of the English language and students in senior

secondary schools in four selected schools. The research reveals that interference of mother tongue, unqualified teachers and shortage of relevant teaching materials are the prevalent problems bedeviling the teaching/learning of Oral English

These phenomena have arisen from the problem of Nigerians coming in contact with varieties of English as identified by Bamisaye (2004). He says that it is possible to varieties, such as Hausa - English (spoken in the northern part of Nigeria where I| language is predominantly spoken), Igbo - English spoken in the Eastern part of ere Igbo is predominantly spoken) and Yoruba ~ English (spoken in the western part of Nigeria where the Yoruba language is predominantly spoken). This is what he calls "Ethnic Englishes" and these varieties confuse children in primary school who come in contact with the English language for the first time.

In teaching the English Language successfully in primary school, it is essential to employ only teachers who study the English Language at a degree level to handle the subject.

This standard may not be too difficult to attain if the government determines to improve the standard of public speaking. Dada (2004) regards language as the speaker's tool, without which effective communication cannot take place.

Instructional materials should be provided by the government to aid the learning of Oral English, such could be charts, recorded tapes, and good dictionaries that teach correct pronunciation. Teachers should be encouraged to speak the English Language to,-the pupils within and outside the classroom to give them good models. They can employ ICT as used in the United Kingdom and the United States of America.

### The Content of Phonology in Secondary Schools

Teaching Oral English in the secondary should cut across the phonemes of English which are called segmental and stress and intonation which are regarded as supra-segmentals. Various authors including Oluikpe, Anasiudu, Otagburuagu, Onuigbo, and Ogbonna, (2001) Afe, Olowoyeye, and Afe, (2004), and Afe, (1998) analyzed the various phonemes to be taught in detail giving various examples.

• The authors focus attention on what is tested by WAEC and NECO as Test of Orals (paper 3 of the English Language) for the Senior Secondary Certificate. Oluikpe, \ et al (2001) identify the main aspects to be taught as: :

- Consonant and vowel contrasts
- Word stress in compound words
- Contrastive syllables,
- Prose and poetry reading '
- Intonation

Throughout the series of their textbook, the aspect is given adequate attention.

Arnold and Gimson, (1982) also give enough practice to students at various levels of education on the pronunciation of English words. The drills given to students include transcription and make the learning of phonology very easy. The following are the 44 phonemes to be taught:

#### The Monophthong

1.

/I:/ legal, phoenix, steal '

/I/subject, village, effect

/e/ breakfast, says, merry

/a;/ impasse, plait, land



/a:/ guard, calm, laugh.  
 /w/ whot, wasp, caught.  
 sword, corps, door.  
 /u/ book, woman, bouquet.

#### The Consonant Sounds

fool, suit, canoe. Money, sun, flood. Serve, worship, journey. Menace, modern, ago  
 the elite, goal, bathe sew, phone, dough, oblige, isle, dry doubt, gown, towel, buoy, envoy, oil.  
 cheer, period, weird.

many, fare, stair, mature, jury, tour.

/p/ pipe, pimples, paper

/t/ Thomas, total, tie.

/k/ archive, king, killer

/b/ bomb, bring, burble,

/d/ fondle, daddy, needle

/g/ target, vague, gear

/f/ frog, fortify, five

/v/ favour, vogue, reluct

/E/ bath, wealth, three

/6/ bathe, with, mother

/s/ psalm, boss, listen.

/z/ result, cause, zero

/(/ machine, shoe, brochure

/3/ measure, division, occasion

lml member, memo, prime

/n/ knee, enough, mourn.

Ay handkerchief, long, sing

/!/ law, bowl, follow.

/r/ write, regular, free

Av/ woman, forward, win

/j/ nuclear, queue, euphemism

/h/ behave, hang, hamper

/d^/ John, gesture, engine

til/ chain, cheese, teach.

#### The Supra-Segmentals .

O. Connor (1989) outlines the aspects of supra-segmentals that could be taught/ learnt in a secondary school as:

#### **The falling tune - the Glide-Down**

#### **The first rising tune - the Glide - Up**

#### **The second rising tune - the take-off**

#### **The falling - rising tune - the dive**

Afe, et al (2004) identify word stress, emphatic stress, pitch, phrasing, the rising tune used for "Yes" and "No" questions, enumeration, polite requests, greetings, an indication of uncertainty, etc, and falling tune for commands, statements, questions that demand information as aspects of supra-segmentals to be taught in secondary schools (JS and SS).

Odunayo (2004) gives copious examples of syllable stress in words of two to six syllables with what should and poly-syllable words: in, -ic, -ia, -sive, etc. he also gives examples of sentence stress and contrastive stress in sentences.

Having identified what should be taught in Primary and Secondary Schools, it is essential to discuss the role of the ICT in imparting the desired knowledge. Both teachers and pupils find phonology difficult to teach and often neglect it. With the introduction of standard computers that contain the phonemes of English, the pupils will have the opportunity to listen to the native speakers of the Language and be encouraged to pronounce correctly. The absence of instructional materials has over been the cog in the wheel of teaching phonology (Oral English/Test of orals) but the introduction of the ICT will break the barrier primary school do not have a competent teacher to handle Oral English at all and the ICT will lighten the burden of teachers and solve the problem of incompetence on the part of teachers. Many pupils in primary schools are not used to browsing the Internet and secondary school students do not browse regularly but merely check their results on the Internet. This phenomenon can adversely affect the use of ICT in Education.

### Conclusion

In conclusion, the aspect of phonology should be taught and a focus on the SSCE Test of Orals should be well entrenched in primary and secondary schools because the goal/objective of teaching any subject in primary school is to obtain the west African School Certificate. If the ICT is put into practice as stipulated in the National Policy of Education (2014), especially in teaching/learning oral English right from primary schools, the pupils would be well grounded in the correct pronunciation. If pupils are familiar with the use of computers and browsing on the internet they will be exposed to standard English that will affect (positively) their spoken English.

### Recommendation

1. Every school should have a computer room or laboratory where teachers and students will be taught English phonology
2. Teachers should be exposed to the acquisition of ICT skills through the organization/attendance of conferences.
3. Teachers should be confident and competent in the use of ICT in teaching oral English.
4. Teachers and pupils should have the right attitude to the use of ICT in the classroom and encourage correct spoken English
5. Headmasters and principals should be specially enlightened and committed to the use of ICT
6. The government should procure enough computers with at least one in each classroom to expose pupils in primary and secondary schools to ICT
7. Primary schoolteachers should be well informed through the attendance of workshops about the use of ICT in teaching various subjects especially Oral English

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